

Message Text

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PAGE 01 NEW DE 17186 262013Z

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C O N F I D E N T I A L NEW DELHI 17186

CINCPAC FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, MASS, IN, PK, US

SUBJECT: EDITORIAL COMMENT ON A-7 SALES

REF: NEW DELHI 16993

1. SINCE THE PRESS REPORTS OF THE MEA'S EXPRESSION OF CONCERN TO THE CHARGE OVER POTENTIAL A-7 SALES TO PAKISTAN (REFTTEL), THERE HAS BEEN NO FURTHER REPORTING OF GOI CONCERN. PRESS COMMENT ON THE SUBJECT OVER THE PAST 10 DAYS HAS BEEN LIMITED TO A HALF-DOZEN EDITORIALS IN THE ENGLISH-LANGUAGE PRESS AND SEVERAL MORE IN VERNACULAR PAPERS. THE GOI HAS APPARENTLY CHOSEN TO LET THE MATTER SUBSIDE AT LEAST FOR PRESENT. MOST OF THE EDITORIALS EXPRESS THE SAME VIEWS: (1) A REJECTION OF THE ARGUMENT THAT THE AIRCRAFT WOULD BE USED FOR DEFENSIVE PURPOSES AND THUS THE SALE WOULD NOT FUEL AN ARMS RACE; (2) THE DANGER OF SUCH A SALE TO INDIAN SECURITY; AND (3) THE DAMAGE WHICH WILL BE DONE TO THE PROCESS OF NORMALIZATION IN THE SUBCONTINENT AND TO IMPROVING INDO-US RELATIONS.

2. "THE TIMES OF INDIA" NOVEMBER 19 SAID THAT THE A-7 SALES

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 NEW DE 17186 262013Z

WOULD BE A "CALCULATED ACT OF UNFRIENDLINESS TO INDIA"

BECAUSE THERE IS NO NEED TO AUGMENT PAKISTAN'S ALREADY "OVERSIZED MILITARY MACHINE" AND THE PENTAGON'S ARGUMENT THAT THE SALE WOULD NOT FUEL AN ARMS RACE IS "PATENTLY DISINGENOUS." THE PRO-MOSCOW "PATRIOT" CHARACTERIZED THE "NEW AMERICAN DEAL ... AS AN INDEPENDENT EFFORT OF THE USA TO START AN ARMS RACE IN THE SUBCONTINENT." THE "FINANCIAL EXPRESS" NOVEMBER 21 LABELED THE REPORTED DECISION AS "UNFRIENDLY" AND SAID THAT IMPLICIT IN THE ARGUMENT THAT PAKISTAN NEEDS THE PLANES FOR DEFENSIVE PURPOSES IS THE "FORD ADMINISTRATION'S CONTINUING BELIEF THAT INDIA POSES A DIRECT THREAT TO THE INTEGRITY OF PAKISTAN AND THAT INDIA STILL NURSES EXTRA-TERRITORIAL AMBITIONS." EXPRESSING A VIEW SHARED BY OTHER EDITORIALISTS, THE "INDIAN EXPRESS" NOVEMBER 26 SAID THAT "THE ARGUMENT THAT THE PAKISTAN AIR FORCE CANNOT, AND WILL NOT, USE THESE PLANES AS DEEP-PENETRATION BOMBERS IS A PIECE OF FICTION THAT WILL NOT BE BELIEVED EVEN BY THE MOST NAIVE." THE "EXPRESS" ALSO SAID THAT THE PROPOSED DEAL CAST DOUBT ON PAKISTAN'S COMMITMENT TO THE PROCESS OF NORMALIZATION. MOST EDITORIALS WERE SKEPTICAL OF THE IDEA THAT THE SALE WOULD DISSUADE PAKISTAN FROM PURCHASING A NUCLEAR REPROCESSING PLANT. THE "NATIONAL HERALD" SUMMED UP THIS VIEW IN STATING THAT "PAKISTAN IS CAPABLE OF ACCEPTING THE WARPLANES AS WELL AS THE NUCLEAR PLANT. MOREOVER, THE STRATEGY TO CHECK NUCLEAR PROLIFERATION IS NOT THE SUPPLY OF NON-NUCLEAR WEAPONS."

3. THE "STATESMAN" NOVEMBER 26 CARRIES A WASHINGTON STORY BY WARREN UNNA THAT US OFFICIALS HAVE DENIED THE ALLEGATION BY "HIGH INDIAN OFFICIALS" THAT PAKISTAN IS "GOING THROUGH THE MOTIONS" OF WANTING A REPROCESSING PLANT ONLY TO FORCE THE US TO APPROVE THE A-7 SALE AS AN ALTERNATIVE. UNNA ALSO REPORTS THAT ACDA HAS RECOMMENDED AGAINST THE SALE.

5. COMMENT: G.K. REDDY, WELL-CONNECTED CORRESPONDENT OF "THE HINDU", TOLD THE CHARGE NOVEMBER 23 THAT FOREIGN MINISTER CHAVAN AND P.N. DHAR, MRS. GANDHI'S SECRETARY, RECOMMENDED TO THE PRIME MINISTER THAT THE A-7 ISSUE SHOULD NOT BE RAISED AT THE CONGRESS PARTY CONFERENCE IN GAUHATI IN ORDER TO AVOID FURTHER POLITICAL ESCALATION OF THE SUBJECT AT THIS POINT. MRS. GANDHI APPARENTLY ACCEPTED THEIR ADVICE; CONFIDENTIAL

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PAGE 03 NEW DE 17186 262013Z

THERE WERE NO REFERENCES MADE AT THE AICC MEETING.
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